PARENT PLUS
INFORMATION FROM YOUR PEDIATRICIAN

Babies should sleep on their backs, play on stomachs

The annual number of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) cases has dropped from 4,891 to 2,162, since the American Academy of Pediatrics' (AAP's)1992 campaign to encourage parents to put babies to sleep on their backs, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The rise in the number of babies sleeping on their backs, though, has led to less time spent on their stomachs. Lack of "tummy time" seems to delay the development of motor skills such as rolling over and crawling, reports a national survey conducted by Pathways Awareness, an organization that educates parents about early motor delays.

It is important that babies spend supervised time on their stomachs when they are awake so they develop strong shoulder and neck muscles.

The AAP recommends that, beginning on the first day home from the hospital, parents should play with the baby two to three times each day while he/she is on his/her stomach. Start with three to five minutes. Over the next few months, gradually increase that time period and the frequency of tummy time until the baby has about one hour each day.

Try some of these activities while the baby is on his or her stomach:

• Place a toy just out of reach during playtime to get the baby to reach for it.

• Place toys in a circle around the baby so that he will reach for the toys and develop muscles for scooting on his belly, crawling and rolling over.

• Lie down and place the baby on your chest, keeping your hands on the baby so he does not roll off. The baby might not be able to lift his head yet, but alternate the baby's head position to prevent him from developing a preferred position.

• Make tummy time part of your daily routine. Place the baby on his stomach for a minute every time you change his diaper.

Although tummy time is important for early muscle development, it is crucial that babies sleep on their backs and not their stomachs to prevent SIDS.

— David Ma